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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2389  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2212  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5301  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2224  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5676  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9280  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0851  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6859  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1891  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2277  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0739  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2651  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4654  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000515

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, INR/EAP,  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2019  
TAGS: [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: ASEAN NARGIS RELIEF SPECIAL ENVOY URGES INCREASED  
DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO DELTA

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Classified By: Economic Officer Marc Porter for Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

1. (SBU) At an August 6 donor meeting in Rangoon, ASEAN's special envoy for post-Nargis recovery urged increased assistance in the Delta, citing dire conditions and the need to set aside "political" considerations. U.S. and Western diplomats, with UN support, emphasized that the political problems plaguing relief efforts, such as delays in visa issuances, originate in Nay Pyi Taw and solutions must come from there. Donor reps noted the useful role high-level ASEAN leaders could play in moving Burma's government toward a more cooperative stance on assistance issues. End summary.

ASEAN Holds Meeting on Way Forward in the Delta

2. (SBU) Charge and Econoff attended an August 6 meeting of donor, UN, and NGO representatives convened by Willy Sabandar, the ASEAN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Post Nargis Recovery in Burma. Sabandar called the meeting to solicit input on ways to inject new momentum into assistance efforts during the remaining 11 months of the current Tripartite Core Group (TCG) mandate, and to share outcomes from the recent ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting.

Situation in Delta Remains Grim

3. (SBU) Sabandar opened with an emotional description of a

recent trip to the Irrawaddy Delta, noting the housing, sanitation, and overall economic situation remain grim for most residents. He described the need for a "great humanitarian effort" to help Delta residents still living in terrible conditions. Sabandar quoted statistics from the TCG's July 2009 Post-Nargis Periodic Review II. Among the findings: 90 percent of households in the affected area consider their shelter unsafe in the event of another cyclone; 76 percent use unimproved water supplies; 84 percent dispose of solid waste inappropriately; 30 percent of school age children do not attend school because their families cannot afford school fees and/or need children to work to meet basic needs; and 90 percent of births occur outside of a health care facility.

#### Politics and Assistance

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¶4. (SBU) Sabandar and ASEAN staff, supported by some NGO representatives, advocated a separation of political goals from humanitarian assistance. Charge, the UN ResRep, and several Western diplomats noted that political problems surrounding humanitarian assistance, as well as the source for solutions, are in Nay Pyi Taw. Burma's government must make a political decision to encourage assistance efforts and remove the roadblocks to implementation. The U.S. and Singaporean Charges noted that the already ambivalent Burmese government attitude toward foreign assistance appears to be exacerbated by the upcoming election. The Singaporean said GOB contacts told her the Burmese leadership is fearful of foreigners involving themselves in the election under the

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cover of providing humanitarian assistance.

¶5. (SBU) Charge, other Western diplomats, and the UN ResRep reiterated past suggestions that ASEAN leaders are in the best position to influence GOB political decisions. The UN ResRep pushed for an ASEAN head of state, perhaps the President of Indonesia or the Prime Minister of Singapore, to visit Nay Pyi Taw to discuss continuing critical post-Nargis humanitarian-assistance needs with senior GOB leaders. Sabandar said the ASEAN Secretariat and some ASEAN ambassadors in Rangoon were considering a visit by all nine resident ASEAN ambassadors to Nay Pyi Taw to meet with the Foreign Minister. The UN and Western attendees noted that, in reality, the Foreign Minister does not make decisions. Higher representations would be necessary to produce results.

Proposed Donor Meeting: Rangoon or New York

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¶6. (SBU) Sabandar proposed a September 9 post-Nargis donor coordination meeting be held in Rangoon, to include a pledging component. He said the meeting could identify critical needs that remain, prioritize them, arrive at cost estimates, and secure funding to meet goals within the one-year TCG time horizon. The UN ResRep proposed that a better time and venue could be on the margins of the UNGA in New York where the UN SYG intends to host a high-level meeting on Burma.

ASEAN FMs Discuss Burma

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¶7. (SBU) Sabandar reported that at last month's ASEAN Foreign Minister's dinner in Phuket, 75 percent of the two and a half hour discussion focused on Burma, primarily Nargis-related issues but also topics related to democratization, Rahkine State, and Andaman Sea disputes. He noted that Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win responded to criticism of the regime's restrictions on donors by noting that 274 aid agencies are now working in Burma; some are international; and the GOB is worried that it can't control their activities. ASEAN SecGen Surin stressed that the TCG

is a useful mechanism that can help sort out which aid efforts are helpful. FM Nyan Win said he would report the discussion to his bosses. Sabandar reported that the Indonesian and Singaporean Foreign Ministers put on the most pressure. Surin said he wants to meet with Burma's Prime Minister in Nay Pyi Taw. On the topic of the 2010 elections, Nyan Win said (presumably in jest) that the elections would probably be announced the week before they are held.

Comment

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18. (C) There is no doubt that conditions for many Burmese in the Irrawaddy Delta remain bleak and that international relief and early recovery efforts have had a meaningful impact, saving lives and starting people on the path toward some sort of sustainable livelihoods. It is worth noting, though, that even pre-Nargis many Delta residents lived a precarious existence, probably reflecting the kinds of statistics cited in the latest PONREPP report. Thus, it is not particularly surprising that the Burmese regime considers the current situation a success story, back to equilibrium.

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Nonetheless, critical needs do remain, and it is appropriate for the USG and other international donors to strive to continue providing humanitarian assistance in the Delta, and for that matter throughout Burma's extensive poverty zones.

19. (C) For such assistance to flow in manageable ways, however, the GOB needs to reconsider its decision last March to return to bureaucratically sluggish oversight of visas, programs, and travel, which had been eased post-Nargis for the Delta via the TCG mechanism. We know from conversations with ASEAN's Surin that he sees the needs and is prepared to encourage his bosses, the ASEAN leaders, to lobby the GOB at the highest levels. To the extent Washington can reinforce Surin's instincts and can encourage ASEAN senior leaders to buy in, we will be playing a very useful role to facilitate our own humanitarian assistance to Burma and the efforts of the international community here more broadly.

DINGER